Tracer

The McHenry County Historical Society's Quarterly Magazine

ENJOYED BY OUR MEMBERS FOR 50 YEARS

2019 - VOLUME 1

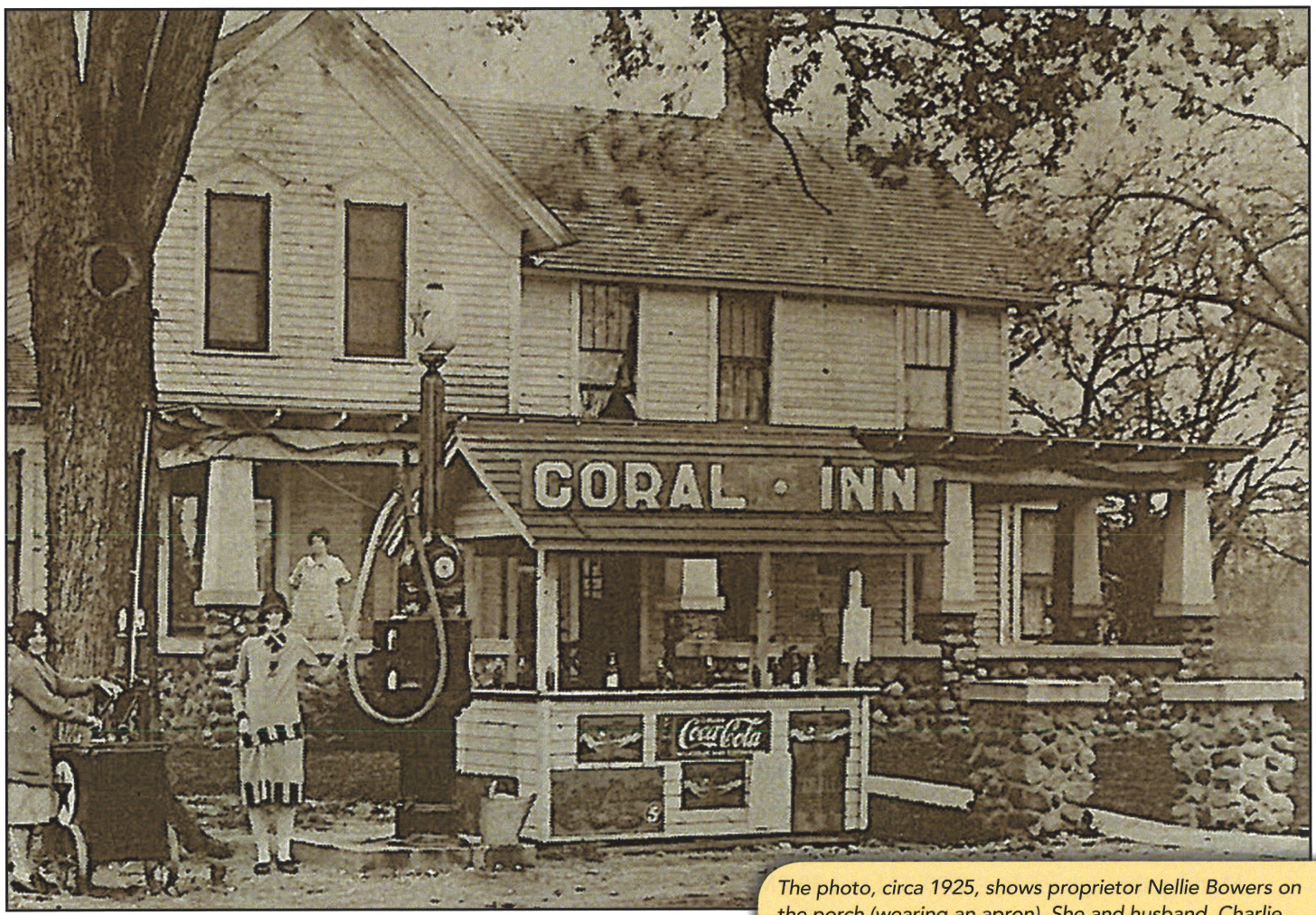

Photo provided by Ed Urban

The photo, circa 1925, shows proprietor Nellie Bowers on the porch (wearing an apron). She and husband, Charlie, operated the destination hotel and dance hall for years.

Ghost Towns of McHenry County:

Coral, Illinois: Town on a Trail

By CRAIG L. PFANNKUCHE

Peering out from the boot of a Frink and Walker Stage Lines coach, you would have experienced a relatively smooth ride from your four-horse team heading into Coral.

Starting about a mile south of town, you would have traversed open prairie. Then, in Section 8 where Coral is located, the trail would have cut through a thick forest.and begun to rise up steep hills. This little community, on the edge of a thick timber belt, would have been a good place to give your horses a "blow," and for passengers to exit the stage before attacking the rough trail – made even bumpier by tree roots.

Under these circumstances, Coral prospered as a village.

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 was a major factor in the flow of pioneers into northern Illinois. Lake schooner

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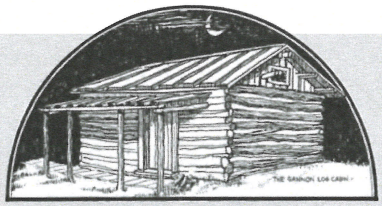

The Tracer is a quarterly publication carrying local history topics, news and information for members of the McHenry County Historical Society.

Our museum is located between Routes 20 and 176, at 6422 Main Street in Union, Illinois

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(MAY through DECEMBER)

1 to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, third Saturdays

McHenry County Historical Society members enjoy FREE admission.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history.

(An Illinois Not-for-profit 501c3 Corporation)

We Appreciate Our Members!

President's Column

Society, museum opening new doors

Spring has sprung and with it your McHenry County Historical Society and Museum continues to exhibit growth.

The board of directors continues to address the areas identified through our museum self-assessment, StEPS. With guidance from our Strategic Planning Committee, each area of improvement has been assigned to the responsible board committee or staff member. Staff members and the board continue to work together utilizing best practices to improve the Society and museum experience.

As part of the process, focus groups which engaged a wide cross section of stakeholders in the county have been led by Catherine Jones, a board member with expertise in this area. On April 11th the board will meet for an offsite retreat to discuss what the focus groups revealed. Together with the external feedback gathered from the focus groups and combined with the StEPs process, the board and staff will begin to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for MCHS.

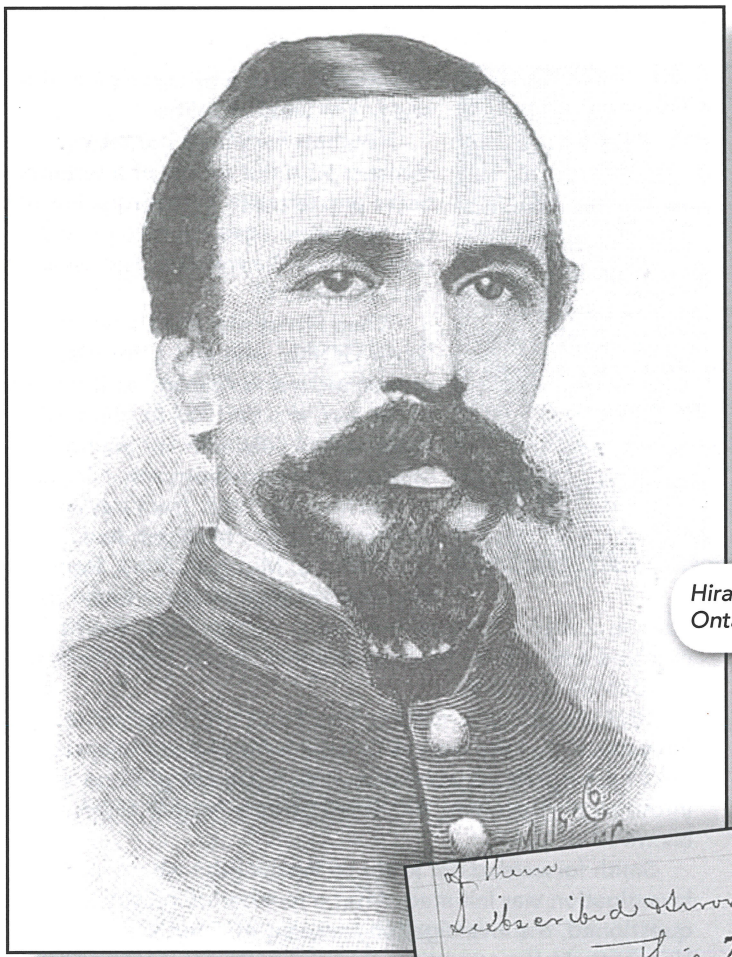
Your continued support is critical to the sustainability of the McHenry County Historical Society and Museum. Our organization alone is the sole repository for local McHenry County history. We are proud to represent the entire county and look to be a destination for individuals within the county and beyond.

To that end, we are thrilled to invite you to our May 3rd museum opening from 6-9 p.m. which features a new 1st floor exhibit space in the Anderson Gallery. The Anderson Gallery is the culmination of the board and staff's commitment to providing a new modern and accessible exhibit space for our patrons. It's benefactors, Glen and Norma Anderson left a generous bequest to the Society upon their death. With a portion of their donation, a new gallery space was created in Eckert Hall to honor their legacy.

New hours of operation will also be in place this season offering increased access to the museum. The museum will now be open continuously May – December on Tuesday's, Wednesday's, Thursday's and Friday's from 1-4 p.m. Additionally each 3rd Saturday of the month the full museum will be open from 1-4 p.m.

With the new improvements and more on the horizon, we are thrilled to kick off our 56th year. The 2019 programs schedules are available and packed with exciting programs and events. Take the opportunity to share them with those you know and invite them to join you. We look forward to seeing you on May 3rd to unveil the new 2-year exhibit *Prairie Trails to Strange Tales: McHenry County's Earliest Years.*

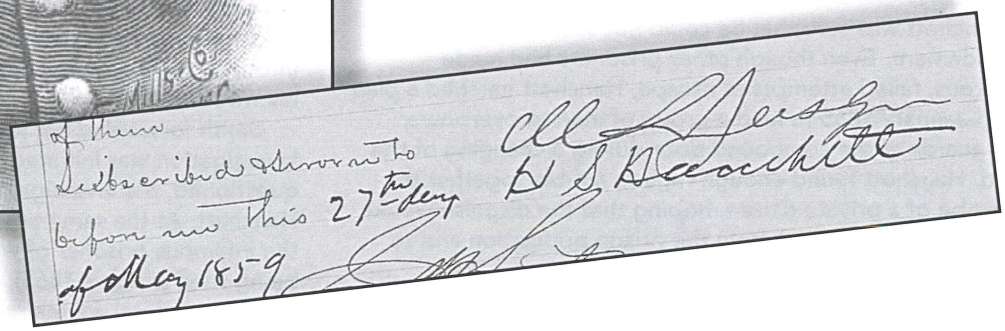
With gratitude,
Mary K. Ott, president



No justice in Civil War murder of a Woodstock leader

By CRAIG L. PFANNKUCHE

Hiram Solon Hanchett was born January 25, 1825, in Ontario, Canada and died in 1865 in Cahaba, Alabama



A volunteer researcher at the archives of the Chicago and North Western Historical Society recently noticed an April 9, 1859, document concerning a transaction between the village of Woodstock and the Chicago, St. Paul and Fond du Lac Railroad (later – Chicago and North Western). The Woodstock law firm of Merritt Joslyn and Hiram Hanchett handled it.

The researcher was astonished to see the original signatures of both men on the document. Until now, no other examples of Hanchett's original handwriting were known.

Born in New York State in 1825, Merritt, a son of Lindsey and Mary Waite Joslyn, came to Woodstock with his parents in the 1840s. He was well known in Woodstock when Hanchett joined the firm in 1857.

Joslyn was deeply involved in the local political scene as a James Buchanan elector from the area in 1856. He became the Woodstock village president in 1861. When the Civil War broke out, Joslyn, seeking to burnish his image for a future political career, joined the 36th Illinois Infantry as a captain of Company "H" in September 1861. He resigned his commission in September 1862.

While Joslyn was away, Hiram Hanchett became the Woodstock village board president. When Joslyn returned, Hanchett left his young wife, Nancy, and their two young sons – Harry, 4, and Charley, 6 months, and joined Company "M" of the 16th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry. With his law background, he was assigned to the regiment's adjutant general's post. Seeing little chance to make a name for himself as an Army lawyer, he, over and over again, requested to be posted at the front.

Following a furlough home to Woodstock in September 1864, he got his wish: front-line duty as a major. He left Woodstock, never to return, not knowing that his wife had become pregnant.

Near Nashville, engaged in mounted combat with a group under the command of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, Hanchett was captured on Nov. 23, 1864 and was shipped off to a prisoner of war compound at Cahaba, Ala. Cahaba was a cotton shipping point on the Alabama River which made it fairly easy to transport Union soldier prisoners to that point. At the camp, Col. Samuel Jones of Mississippi, who yearned for greater military glory than to be a prison camp commandant, harshly greeted him.

Hanchett was thrust into a sea of humanity, among more than 3,000 fellow prisoners housed in a compound built to hold 500. Jesse Hawes, a fellow prisoner who wrote a book in 1888 about his experiences at Cahaba, said that a drafty cotton storage barn was the only building in the compound. It contained enough bunks for about 600 men, while the rest had to sleep on the floor amid winter's chill.

Corn meal mush was the basic food for prisoners. A surgeon assigned to the camp stated that the compound's water supply was "found with the filth from hogs, dogs, cows and horses. In it are rinsed bucket, tub and spittoon cleanings of groceries, offices, and hospitals."

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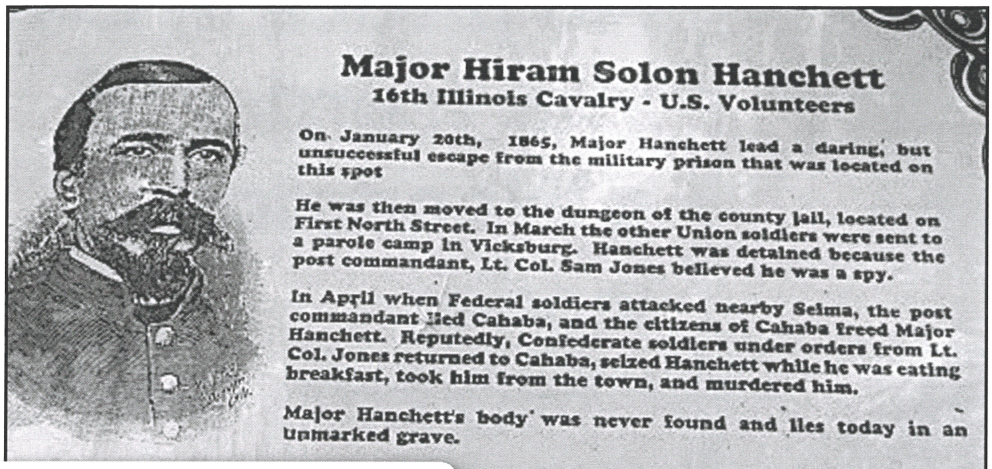


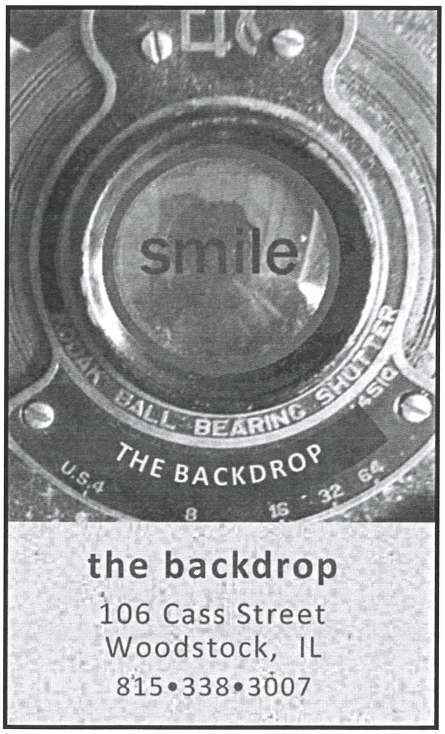
Sign from Old Cahawba Archeological Park

Back in Woodstock, Nancy Hanchett was not able to find out what had happened to her husband. Fearing the worst, she decided to name her future child if it was a boy, Hiram Hanchett after his father as her gift to her husband when he came home.

Hanchett was sure that he could not survive further imprisonment. Even though other prisoners had made numerous, failed attempts at escape, Hanchett hatched a plan in mid-January 1865 to lead a group of men to overpower their guards at the compound door during a changing of the guard. Hanchett found enough rags to cobble together the wardrobe of a private citizen, hoping that the disguise would allow him to stand apart from the prison population and to move across country to safety after his escape.

All who had attempted to escape were captured and returned to the compound – except for Hiram Hanchett.

Records show that Jones, furious that Hanchett had disguised himself as a civilian, treated him as such – placing him in a "6-foot-square hole" at the Cahaba City Jail. There Hanchett remained until mid-April 1865. At that time, Jones began a release of Union prisoners but held onto Hanchett.



In a May 7, 1994, former Northwest Herald columnist Jerry Kuyper wrote that jailer J.A. Hawith took Hanchett out of his dungeon and to his own house in Cahaba. There he fed the emaciated prisoner a breakfast of meat and, of course, cornpone. During the meal, Jones and three other Confederate soldiers entered the house and said that they had orders to take Hanchett to a prisoner-exchange site to the west of Selma.

Hanchett rose from the table, climbed onto the saddle of a tethered horse and left with his captors. He was not seen alive again. A mile or two outside town he was shot and his body was disposed of.

When Nancy Hanchett's father, David Griffith, who was a Woodstock grocer, moved to Chicago at the close of the war, she decided to follow him there to find help with her young family and her newborn son, Hiram, Jr. On May 16, 1865, from a small apartment at 310 Michigan Ave. (now 1014 S. Michigan Ave.), Nancy Hanchett wrote a plaintive letter to Gen. A. J. Smith. It noted that a few months back, she had received a note from her husband that he was being held at the Cahaba City Jail.

"But I have heard nothing from him since," she wrote. "I have heard that the men at Cahaba have all been released but I have not had a word from him. If you can give me any information concerning him it will be very happily received by his wife."

Smith forwarded her letter to Washington where an investigation was initiated. After a number of individuals were questioned, the investigation revealed that Jones murdered Hanchett. At the same time that Henry Wirtz – commander of the infamous prisoner of war camp in Andersonville, Ga. – was being tried (August 1865), convicted and executed for war crimes, a federal warrant was issued for the arrest of Samuel Jones. He, too, was wanted for war crimes; especially for the murder of Hanchett.

The last official word about Jones, was that he had in his possession more than $40,000 in federal currency at the end of the war – all confiscated from prisoners entering the Cahaba compound. This author discovered that, before the war, Jones was an officer in a "savings bank" in New Orleans. In 1870 he was, as listed in the New Orleans City Directory of that year (but not in any federal census listing), back in New Orleans running the "New Orleans Savings Institution."

According to Hawes account: "Hachett was taken forth from the dark dungeon, his strong frame so reduced that he was scarcely able, even under the stimulus of hope, to stand, placed in the custody of the assassins, and started toward Selma. He was shot down in cold blood before he was a mile from town."

Jones eluded capture, living off his ill-gotten wealth until his death in 1873. He is buried in New Orleans' Greenwood Cemetery.

Nancy Hanchett lived on with her family in Chicago, never knowing what happened to her husband. There is no written record that the Army or any government official ever apprised her of any results following the investigation. She died in Chicago on Feb. 26, 1877. A Cook County death certificate states that her body was sent to Woodstock for burial. She lies in the P. W. Murphy plot in Oakland Cemetery with a daughter, Ada May, who died in Woodstock at age 2 in May 1860. Hiram, Jr., who died in January 1867, also is buried there.

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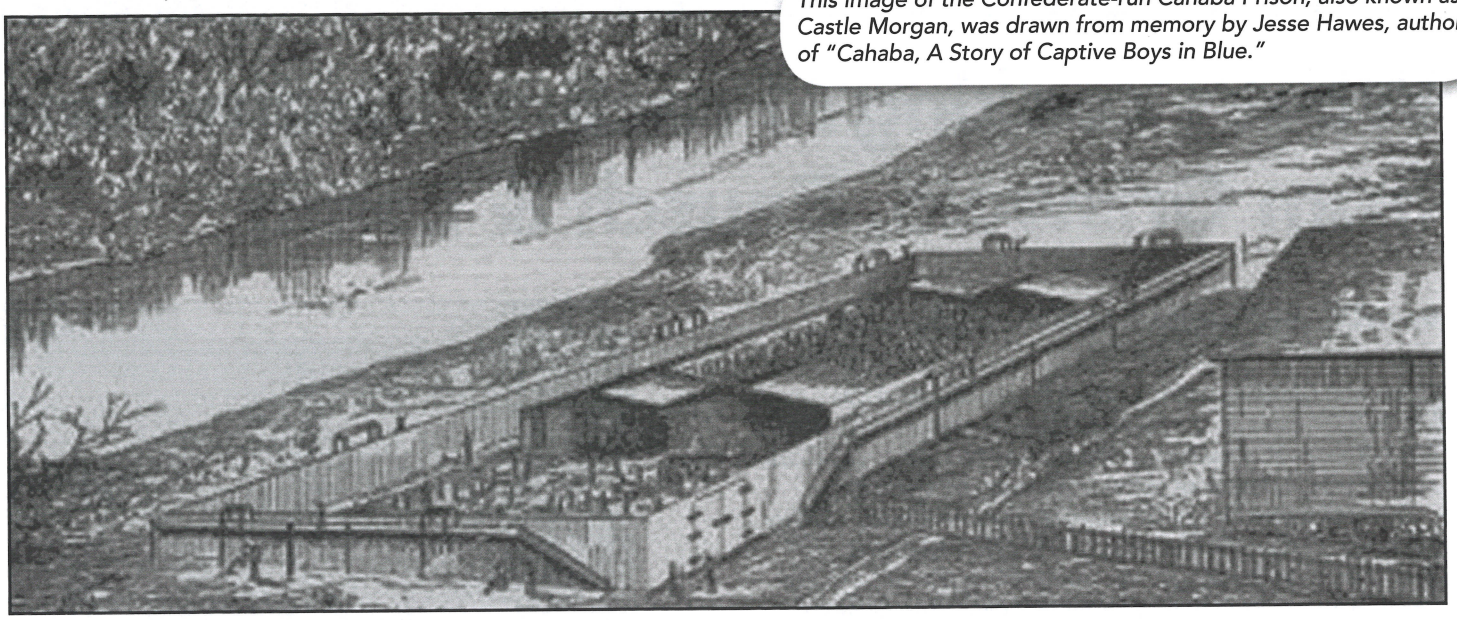


This image of the Confederate-run Cahaba Prison, also known as Castle Morgan, was drawn from memory by Jesse Hawes, author of "Cahaba, A Story of Captive Boys in Blue."

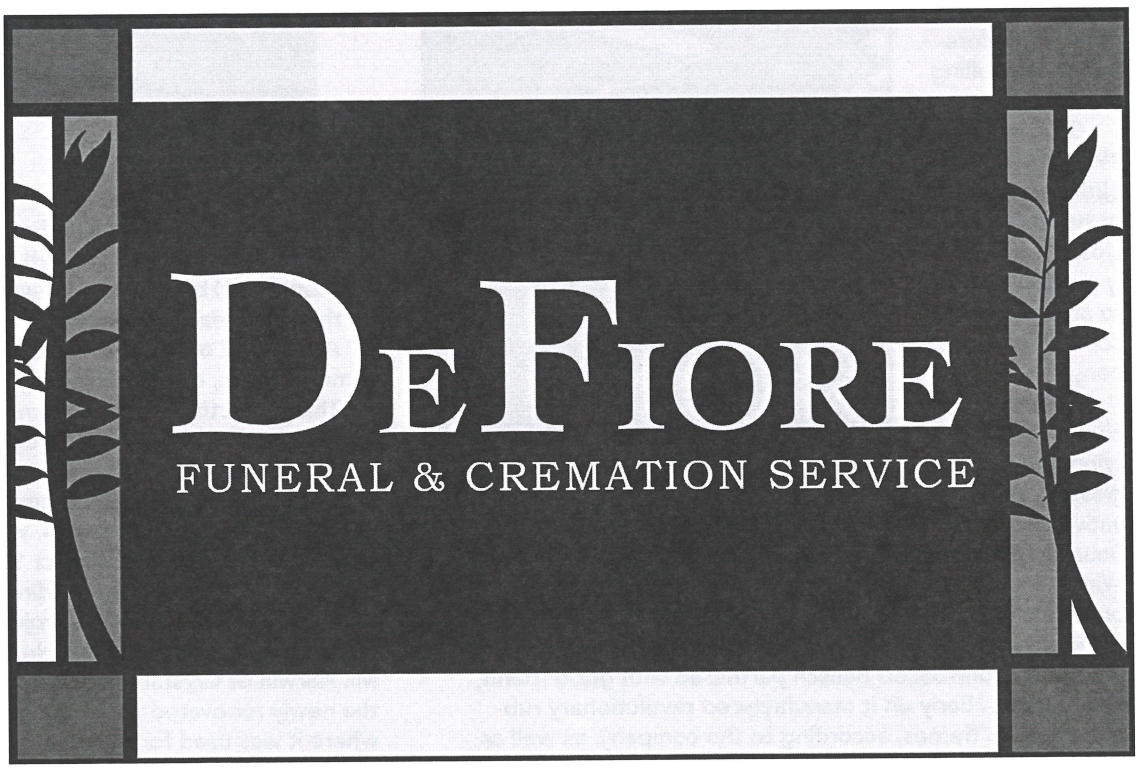
There are no markers for anyone in that Murphy plot which can barely be seen at the far east end of the cemetery across the street from a dentist's office.

An arguably greater horror awaited many of the survivors of their Cahaba experience. The federal government sent the majority of the ex-prisoners west to a parole camp outside of Vicksburg, Miss. so that they could be taken home by steamboat – mostly to places in Indiana and Ohio. Designed for carrying 376 passengers, as she pulled away from the dock, the Sultana was heavily overloaded with 2,155 mostly weary, sick and emaciated men.

On the cold night of April 27, 1865, in mid-river near Memphis, the Sultana caught fire, burned and sank. Almost 1,200 men either burned to death or drowned in the dark, cold water. It remains the worst maritime disaster in the United States.

Today, Cahaba is, curiously, a beautiful place to visit. There is a well-maintained "Old Cahaba Archaeological Park," which touts the fact that it is the site of the first capitol of Alabama as well as an interesting Alabama "ghost town." Walking along the paths through the ruins of the town, one will come upon one of many historical markers in the park on which a line drawing of Hiram Hanchett can be seen.

The marker mostly describes what happened to the mass of Union soldiers imprisoned there but Hanchett's "death" is also mentioned. The site is worthy of a visit today. ◆



What's cooking? Practical innovations from Griswold, Bausch & Lomb

By JACK CUNNINGHAM AND KURT BEGALKA

Bob and Christine Frenz of Crystal Lake donated this "BOLO" oven to the McHenry County Historical Society in 2013. Bob, past president of the Society's board of directors, and his wife, Chris, is an active volunteer and docent.

Manufactured by the Griswold Manufacturing Co. of Erie, Pa. in the 1920s, BOLO stands for "Big Oven, Little Oven." Placed on the stovetop, it was designed to provide a homeowner with a portable, supplementary oven. The Griswold sales book described them as having a polished steel body, electric-welded case, perfect-fitting glass drop door, corrugated tin lining, nickel "Alaska" handles and equipped with two electric-welded wire racks.

Warmed by the stove's gas burners, the company also touted BOLO's "remarkable advantage" offering two separate sections – "the lower one hot for fast baking and the upper one moderately hot for slow baking."

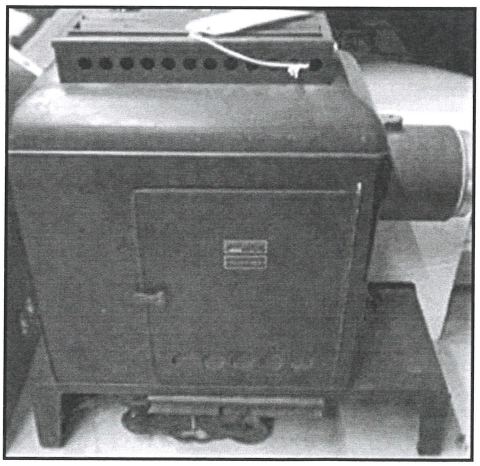
The handles along the sides allow for greater ease when carrying the oven and they also fold down to allow for better storage and to save space.

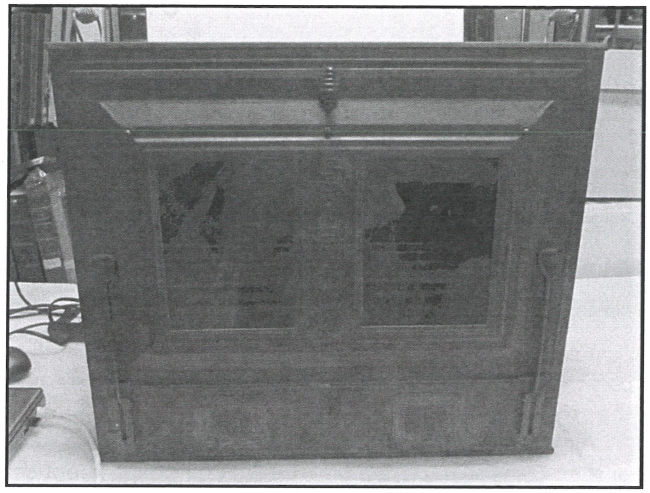
In the 1870s, Griswold began manufacturing skillets, pots, waffle irons and other camp cookware. The company was renamed Selden & Griswold Manufacturing Co. in 1873. In 1887, after Matthew Griswold bought out two partners in 1884, it was reorganized as Griswold Manufacturing Co. The company expanded its repertoire to include the still-coveted Dutch ovens and roasters, before eventually selling out in 1946.

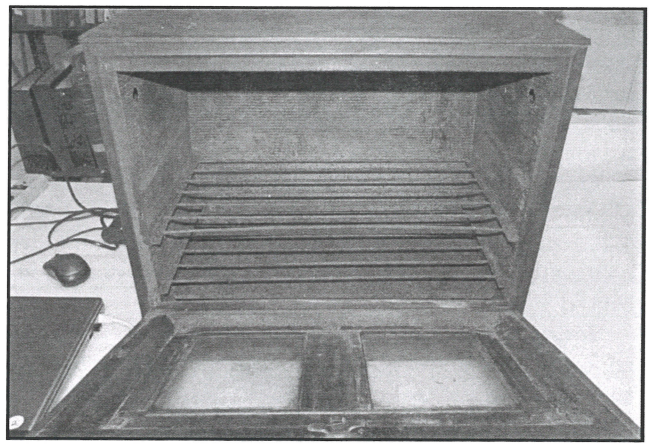
On Dec. 7, 1957, the plant at 12th and Raspberry streets in Erie closed – effectively putting an end to an innovative cookware company.

• When it comes to marrying metal and glass for innovative purposes, you would be hard-pressed to outdo the Bausch and Lomb Optical Co. of Rochester, N.Y. William Wingate of Woodstock donated this visual communication projector from the Society's collection, to MCHS in 1993.

Today's Bausch & Lomb, Inc. began in 1853 when German immigrant John Jacob Bausch partnered with good friend, Henry Lomb. Early on it manufactured revolutionary rubber eyeglass frames, according to the company, as well as a variety of optical products that required a high degree of precision. By 1903, the firm had been issued patents for microscopes and binoculars – as well as a camera shutter based on the eye's reaction to light.







Projector on left

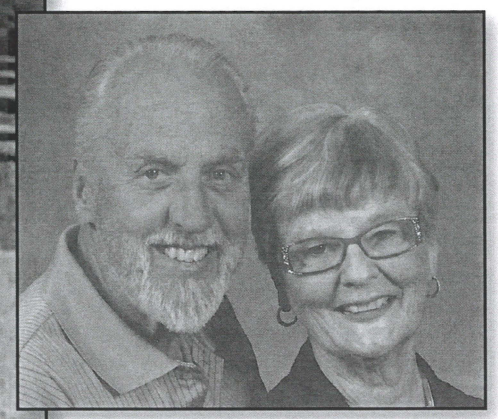
BOLO stovetop oven above

At the end of the 19th century the product range included camera lenses, camera diaphragms and projectors.

This projector was used from about 1930 until 1941 in Mrs. Eva Jamison's classroom at Haeger School in Barrington. The projector was later used in Countryside School Barrington and at several one-room schoolhouses – including Haeger and Barrington's Country-Day schools, which were consolidated and became the Barrington District 1 or Countryside School.

Wingate, the audio-visual director of Countryside School during that time, found the projector in the attic of Barrington Country-Day School in 1947. He then had it renovated by a Mr. Kerwin of Crystal Lake that same year. Wingate brought the newly renovated projector back to Countryside School where it was used for 22 more years. ◆

Alan Cornue at age 15 or 16 is pictured on that Ford tractor while we were cleaning the barn. That is the front of the house that was built in 1847. Alan and his wife, Bonnie, shown below.



Cornue family rooted in agriculture for 150 years... and counting

By ELKE KLEISCH

KLEISCH: How did you end up in Genoa City, Wis.?

CORNUE: "In the summer of '05 we ended up at German Fest in Milwaukee for a special weekend. ... As a result of our trip, Bonnie said: "This is where I want to live."

I said if we are going to make Milwaukee our home, I still am going to have a small apartment so that during the week I won't have to drive back. I finally found a condo up in Lake Geneva. ... It eventually sold in 2010.

This house, right here, is the one Bonnie grew up in. Her parents bought it in 1946 when she was 3 years old and she lived here until we got married. Her folks, who died in the early '90s, had left the house in the mid-'80s and came to live with us in Woodstock.

Bonnie's brother, William George Robinson, purchased this house and he had tenants in here. They would be here one, two, three years and then move out, leaving the house trashed. He'd spend thousands of dollars fixing it, and then he'd get another tenant in here. It was a cycle that repeated every two or three years. He said he was absolutely sick of it.

When we put our house up on the market he said to us, "Please come and rent from me. I'll give you a good deal." It was very low rent and all we had to do was take care of the place and, of course, fix it up. We had experience in construction. We had renovated places and built our own house at 679 Dane St. in Woodstock.

We have been working on this house [in Genoa City] for the past nine years, fixing it up the way Bonnie wants it. It has been nice for us. Of course, it is close to the farm. And, she knows everyone in Genoa City having grown up here. We did end up with a condo in Milwaukee, which we go to on weekends.

KLEISCH: So how did your family end up in farming and in Illinois so many years ago?

CORNUE: On my father's side – Pierre Cornu without the 'e' – came from Holland in 1725 and settled in Schenectady, N.Y. Apparently, they were Huguenots. And, if you remember European history, in the 1600s the Huguenots were so persecuted by the Catholics in France that 600,000 of them left the country. That devastated France economically because they were all middle class. A large group went to Germany, and some of them went to Holland, because those countries were willing to accept them. This is the side of the family I am connected with.

Pierre Cornu brought the name [with him] from Holland. He settled in Schenectady, which was a Dutch community. He married a Dutch girl and his son married a Dutch girl, and his son married a Dutch girl. So, by the time it made it to my grandfather, he was pretty much a Dutchman.

Pierre had two sons, Daniel and Charles, and a daughter, Elizabeth. Elizabeth married a guy named John Knox who was the ancestor of the people who started the Knox gelatin company. Charles died at the age of 19. Daniel, I don't know what he did.

Pierre had been a cabinetmaker; made furniture and stuff like that. His son, Daniel, born in 1740, had five or six sons and maybe nine kids all together. The eldest one was my

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It shouldn't come as a surprise that the Cornue family farm in Alden Township is officially designated a "Sesquicentennial Farm" by the state.

Not only has the property at 15405 Stateline Road been in the family for 172 years, its history has been cultivated and its roots nurtured. During its lifetime the farm, owned by Alan D. Cornue since January 1982, has expanded from 120 acres to 370 acres.

After talking to the former Woodstock mayor about which factors contributed to his family's ability to keep the farm so long, I discovered that Cornue's motivation wasn't farming. Rather, it was that connection between himself and other people – between past and present – he cherished the most. Throughout his time in Woodstock, as well as Lake Geneva and Genoa City, Wis., he has created these connections – not only with farming, but using knowledge of his own history and through public service – which spanned 32 years as a plan commissioner and mayor in Woodstock.

"I didn't intend to continue to serve here in Genoa City. They wanted me to run for village president. They said with all the experience I had in Woodstock, I couldn't move to Genoa City and not run. I then decided to run for village trustee, and I have been doing that for six years. Being in office gives me further interest in the community that I didn't have. For me, I know what works and doesn't work."

The 81-year-old's life has followed a few different paths, some of which had nothing to do with farming. He even thought about becoming a lawyer, but he did not feel that connection to the earth he relishes. Throughout his life, Alan Cornue has a remained tied to the land his great-grandfather once tilled – not only for the love of farming, but because of a profound understanding of his past and his place in the world around him.

– Elke Kleisch

ancestor. His name was Wessel, and he was born in 1760. In 1776, when the Revolutionary War was gearing up, he was 16 and his father was 36. So, the two of them signed up for a colonial company in Schenectady. For the entire war they went out west to the Mohawk River to guard the farmers from the Indians who were hired by the British to burn the crops. They did that every summer.

When the war was over, what happened was that the whole family packed up and moved out to Canajoharie, N.Y., on the Mohawk River, and bought farms. Wessel was my great-grandfather's grandfather. He was the first farmer.

Most of these families had nine or 10 kids and the oldest son got the farm. All the rest of them have to go out on their own. My great, great-grandfather was Anthony, and he was the second son of Wessel. He went west over by Steuben County, north of Corning, N.Y., and got a farm. My great-grandfather, Daniel, who came here, was the second son. His older brother got the farm there.

Prior to his coming to Wisconsin in 1844, there were about six or seven Cornue families that packed up from that area. Some of them were up by Syracuse. All these sons have gone west, but they must have kept in contact because they came from all sections of New York state – and that was after the Erie Canal was in. They went by canal over to Buffalo and got on a ship that sailed through the Great Lakes to Wisconsin. That was in 1844. They settled in Linn Township on a road that is just half a mile north of the state line. So, along that road in 1844, it was one Cornue farm after another.

My great, great-uncle had a farm on County B, northwest of Zenda. Most of them were a part of that one group and most of them were on this one road. And, you will never guess what the name of the road is today.

KLEISCH: Cornue?

CORNUE: Mohawk. [laughing] So, my great-grandfather, Daniel, comes here in 1846. He's 27 at the time and single. He borrowed $1,500 from his dad. He was going to come out here and buy a farm and build a house. When he gets here in 1846, all the land on the Wisconsin side is sold. So, he went into Chicago and checked on the Illinois side of the line. The land here had been purchased, as well. But there was 120 acres within a mile of where they were that was purchased by a guy from Chicago for $150 … a buck and a quarter an acre. He had it up for sale. So in January 1847, my great-grandfather bought it for $190.

During the summer of 1847 he built a house, put in a well and built a barn. In the fall, he went back to Steuben County and in January got married, and in May they came back. His wife, Mary Jane Olmsted, was 20 at the time. He was 28.

They came back by boat in May and came to the house.

KLEISCH: What did they farm there initially?

CORNUE: Primarily corn and vegetables because they had to clear the land. They didn't have many acres to begin with. We have a series of 25 letters that they wrote back to her parents and most of the letters are about how the crops are doing, how the weather is, and how they're faring, and so on. Some of the beginning crops were kind of sad. They struggled. They planted corn and the crows ate all the crops and they replanted. And it just goes on and on. It didn't rain. The heat wasn't good. He put the crops in the wagon and hauled it over to Kenosha – although it wasn't called Kenosha at that time. I think it was Southport (edit note: 1837-1850). And sold it for 10 cents a bushel.

They went on for about a year and finally there was a joyous letter after about a year and a half or two years. They went into Lake Geneva and sold a batch of butter and had enough money to buy his wife a winter coat. And they were so happy.

The letter that almost brings tears to your eyes is the one written in November. She got pregnant right away, and she had the baby in November. And she is crying on and on because she wishes her mother was there during this period. Daniel is writing this letter to her family telling them the whole story about the birth and their daughter crying.

Over the period – three, four or five years in – you see the whole thing turn. They are raving about what a wonderful place this is and that people should come out here. Over the next five to 10 years, or so, her brothers come one by one to visit. Some of them go to Minnesota. The Olmsteds came to this country in 1835 from England on the ship, Sea Lion. That is the same family of Frederick Law Olmsted that did the Central Park and the Midway in Chicago, as well as Milwaukee's Lake Park. Frederick was her cousin.

Her grandmother's maiden name was Kovenhoven and that name is from a Dutch family that was here from the early 1600s. They owned 3,000 acres – which is now Brooklyn, N.Y.

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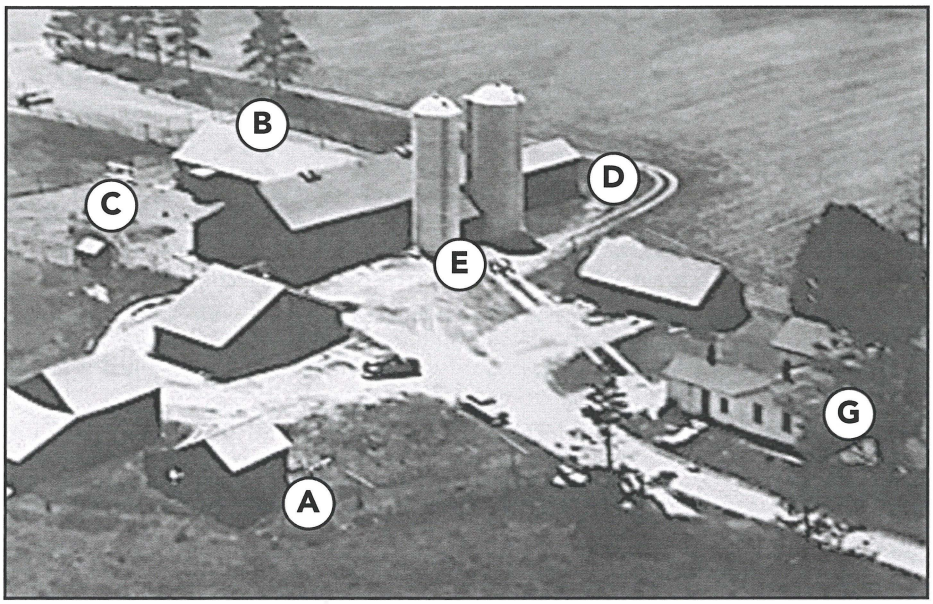

This aerial of the farm was taken in June 1953 with a view from the southwest. Pictured are the original house (A) built by William Cornue in 1847 – moved to this location in 1927 from another part of the farm. In the 1890s, In the 1890s, William built an extension (B) - adding capacity to the barn for almost 30 cows. William was president of the Alden Creamery. There was no electricity here until the 1920s, so he had to run milking machines with a vacuum pump. He built the cement-block, fire-resistant structure (C) to house the pump. This other barn extension (D) was built in 1930. The house (G) was built in 1860. The silage pit (E) was added in 1917.

That is what is fascinating to me. It's neat to know, and you get some feelings about the people. If you're reading the history about a country and at the same time reading about what some of these people are doing, it really lends a feeling of here's the struggle that they have been experiencing and these are the issues they're seeing.

One of the letters to Daniel's father in-law, John Olmsted, talked about who they were going to vote for as president. Daniel said, "I am kind of inclined to vote for [Martin] Van Buren." Of course, he's the Dutch guy from New York, so that's understandable. They were paying attention to what was going on.

He died early at age 64 from a heart attack in 1883 and, at that point, he owned 400 acres. He started with 120 and every time something came up next door to him, he bought it. He just kept expanding down the road. He had five children and 400 acres, so each child got 80 acres.

My grandfather had two older brothers who were married and had their own 80-acre parcel. They got title to it. My grandfather was still at home. In July 1903, he bought a house in Hebron from the Stewart family at 10006 Union St.. They were one of the original settlers in Hebron Township. They have a lot of farms on Vanderkarr Road. One of the Stewarts was a contractor who built houses. He built one in 1895 and sold it to my grandfather in 1903.

There was a lot of speculation as to why he was buying a house at 42 years old. Two months later the question got answered. The next article said: W.D. [William Dwayne] Cornue married Ms. Ada Belle Wilson from Sharon, Wis. and that they were going to live in there.

That was the house I grew up in. My dad and mother got married in 1935, in the fall. The two honeymooned in Florida. They were in the process from driving back and met his folks coming down from Hebron. They had lunch or dinner together in Tennessee and then proceeded on their way. My folks got back to the house there in Hebron and when they walked in, on the kitchen table was a deed. My grandfather had purchased a house two doors down. They moved and left him the house. So, the house on Union Street was where I grew up.

Daniel also had two sisters. The older sister, Elvina, left. The younger one, Ellen Amanda, was at home. Each got 80 acres of the original homestead. The first thing Daniel did was give each of his sisters a note, and bought their land.

The older sister, Elvina, married a guy named Darth Porter from Walworth, Wis., and he was a merchant of some kind and he moved to Kansas City. Ellen Amanda, at that point, was 16 or 17. She was getting ready to get married, so I guess she was happy to have that money. She married a farmer who had access to his own farm, so they didn't need the land.

My dad, Stanley, was an only child. In 1911 my grandfather, William, bought another 160 acres a mile away on another farm. He had 400 when he died, and my dad got it all.

When my dad died, I had to share it with my two brothers, Llyod and Paul, and a sister, Sandra. It took me three years, but I got them all out of it. In '95 I bought my sister out. She was out in California anxious for money. We did an appraisal and I paid her for her share. At that point, I owned half of it. I had my two brothers to buy out. They weren't interested in farming.

In 2000 they came to me and said we ought to see the 160-acre farm – or part of it, at least. They thought we should do it as a group. Well, that was a poorer farm, than the 240. The 240 is almost all tillable. The 160 acres were very hilly, lots of woods on it, pasture.

As luck would have it (this was the year 2000) that recreational land was much higher in value. It was [fetching] $7,000 per acre and the farmland was $3,000 per acre.

I told them, "I'm not interested in selling, but what I am willing to do is trade you your interest in the 240 acres with my interest in the 160. Then the 160 will be yours and you can sell the whole thing." They looked at the numbers. They didn't have to share the cash with me. They jumped on it. They proceeded to sell the whole thing at $7,000 an acre. … I got the 240 acres and I had my mother buy a 40-acre parcel that was adjacent to us, which was one of the best field I got. Almost all of it was Drummer, the Illinois state soil. It is just rich as can be. The black dirt is three or four feet deep.

I tiled it to get the water off. The reason it was never tiled is that it was always used as a pasture; never been farmed. This was in 1985 before all the rules came in prohibiting tiling. So, I snuck it in just in time.

KLEISCH: What do you plant?

CORNUE: Corn, wheat and soybeans. It's a rotation. I hire a guy to actually plant and harvest the crop.

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KLEISCH: Do you have children?
CORNUE: One son, Daniel.

KLEISCH: Will he be carrying on with the farm?
CORNUE: From the standpoint that he appreciates the fact that it has been in the family for 172 years, he said to me more than once: "Dad I don't think we should ever sell this."

He is a fifth-grade teacher in Columbia, South America. A year and a half ago he got married to a Columbian girl. He has a daughter who is a year old. I don't think he is going to be back here. It's a big family who is close knit. One of his fellow teachers is married to his twin sister. They live about a block apart.

Nevertheless, if he has interest in the ownership and history of it that is fine. He makes his own decisions about what he does. Who knows, he may have a son or daughter who has the interest in it, and they can pursue it. It's there.

KLEISCH: What kind of changes have you seen in McHenry County?
CORNUE: It's moved from almost entirely an agricultural county to one that is both industrial and commuter. At least for the eastern half of the county, that overrides everything. The western half still has some agricultural interest, but even they are diminishing as time goes on. The nature of the farming business has changed; huge operations today.

KLEISCH: What has been your driving force to keep farming and keep the farm?
CORNUE: I appreciate the history and family history that's involved in that particular parcel. My father had me driving a tractor when I was 6 years old. He had a Ford tractor out there, one from the 1930s. It's a flat, low tractor and I could drive it because I could straddle the transmission. It had plates down there for the clutch and brake. Standing up on the seat in front of this platform, the steering wheel's right in front of me.

My dad made a trailer out of a Model T frame and we were picking up rock on this less desirable farm. He would show me how to get it into low gear and told me, "If I say stop you push down on the clutch and stand and wait. If I say go, let it up again." He didn't want the tractor to get too far ahead of him when he was moving the rock. At the same time, I had to move forward. That was my job.

That just graduated into bigger and bigger jobs like doing actual fieldwork when I was 7, 8, 9 years old. In the springtime, I am out there doing the disking and plowing. I am following on the disc. I grew to love it and I thought that this is what I am going to do with my life. I was going to be a farmer – which lasted until I was 16.

I was in 4-H and FFA. I got projects. I had hogs out there; 100 head of hogs. I had a field that I was running for my dad and planting corn in it. Those were the days when 60 bushels of corn was a pretty good deal. But, I had read this article in Successful Farming magazine in 1950/51 written by a professor at Indiana University. He was pointing out that it was possible to raise a 100 bushel corn simply by fertilizing. He was advocating for 10-10-10 broadcast ahead of plowing, then another heavy dose with the planter. Then, come back in late June/July and side dress it with some ammonium nitrate and you'd get 100 bushels per acre. So, I point this out to my dad, and I asked, "Could I have 5 acres to try this out?" He agreed.

I was a freshman in high school. We broadcast the fertilizer and put that in with the planter. We were cultivating corn with this Ford tractor. It had a two-row behind the cultivator. For just a few dollars we were able to get some hoppers and a wheel with a belt that would disperse the fertilizer alongside the road since we cultivated. That, along with fertilizing it with ammonium nitrate; and sure enough we had a 100-buschel acre.

KLEISCH: So did your dad pick up on that?
CORNUE: The next year, we were raising beef cattle. We had about 50 acres that went into silage. Didn't raise it for grain, just for silage. So, the next year, for his 50 acres of silage, I noticed the machine shed was loaded with bags of ammonium nitrate. We had to side dress the whole 50 acres. [laughter] Got beautiful corn. You see it, it would just green up and just skyrocket.

When I was 16, I was sure what I was going to do: go down to the University of Illinois, earn a degree in agriculture and go back to the farm. Sitting out there, riding out there on the tractors, I had a lot of ideas as to what to do with the farm.

My dad had polio in 1949. I essentially did all the work out there from that point on. All through high school I got up at 5 in the morning, went out to the farm, taking care of the hogs and the cattle. Then, I went to school. Once school was out, I went back and worked on the farm.

I was happy. I was really doing stuff.

KLEISCH: So did you go to University of Illinois?
CORNUE: Eventually. When I was 16, I had taken the National Merit Scholarship test and qualified for one of their things. Before they did that you had to fill out this questionnaire. I am sitting at the dining room table filling it out and my dad is following along as I am answering these questions.

I got to the page asking me what I wanted to do and what I wanted to study. When I got to that, he asked, "How are you going to answer those questions?"

I explained that I wanted to be a farmer and would like to go to the University of Illinois and get a degree in agriculture. He looked at me, and said, "No you're not."

Well, it floored me. "No? Why not?"

I got this long explanation as to how demeaning it was to be a farmer. He'd been the first one in the family that had gotten out of it. He went to college and got a degree in economics. Of course, he graduated in 1931, and you know what the job situation was. He's working for 10 cents an hour in the local grocery store. Then, came the second World War. I was born in 1938. My dad was number four on the draft list in McHenry County and my mother was about to get pregnant again.

My grandfather told him, "I don't know what you think about this but you are not going in to fight in the war."

Well, my dad was working in the grocery store. He was doing other things on the side trying to make more money. He did not have much success and he was not successful at going to Chicago and getting a job that paid anything based on his education.

My grandfather said, "I am going to give you a 160-acre farm." He had built a new dairy barn on it several decades before. Had tenant farmers there milking cows. "We're going to get you a herd and a Ford tractor and implements. And you are going to farm that 160 acres and milk cows."

That made him exempt from the draft. So, that is how he spent the war.

While he never talked about it with me, and I never asked, I suspected that experience in some respects left him with a

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bad taste in his mouth. He had to live in this small town. While he didn't grow up on the farm, he ended up there when the draft came along, which got him out of it. He was one of the few people who did get out of it other than the farmers that were there all the time anyway.

I just suspect that influenced his emotions thinking about the subject. From my perspective, once he made it clear that he wasn't going to help me if I wanted to farm, I was shut off from it as far as he was concerned. It was a futile effort because there is so much capital involved in getting into it. You can't just do it cold. You have to have some help.

My experience in school was that all the teachers would say, "You're very lucky. You have the ability to do whatever you want to do." But, the only thing I wanted to do was farm. I knew I had the ability to that already. I just needed to put my mind to it, and it wasn't a physical thing. You have to construct a business and that all was changing. I am reading these magazines, and I knew what was coming down the road. But I didn't imagine the stuff that came down the road today.

So, I spent a few years deciding what I was going to do. I worked at a punch press in a factory thinking about it, knowing it was not a long-term situation.

I did go to Beloit for two years, which is what he wanted me to do because that is where he went. I saved up some money. It was $1000 a year at that time. I graduated high school with $2000 in the bank. That paid for two years of school. After that, I went back to work again.

After three years of working, I thought "whatever I do, I need to go back to school." I thought as a general idea, I should go into law. Even if I didn't end up being a lawyer, it was certainly background for a lot of things. I looked at the catalog for University of Illinois. At that point, I had a two-year degree from a liberal arts college, which covered a lot of requirements for a degree, but it didn't start me on any particular direction. I had always been good at math and bookkeeping. The accounting degree offered me the greatest flexibility to allow me to take a variety of courses economics and finance. Some degrees you are so restricted, you have to follow a path, and a lot of stuff you might not care about. Just on the basis of that, I decided to get an accounting degree because it allowed me all these other courses.

The tuition was only $112 dollars. [laughter]. That was for the whole thing, whether you took four or eight courses. So, I packed in as many courses as possible – six or seven at a time. I got the accounting degree in two years. Later, I got my master's degree in taxation from DePaul University.

I went to law school and that lasted one year. It was tough to say no, that I didn't want to. I took the law school admissions test and I got a 99.6 percent on it. The school called me up and said they were going to give me a $1,000 scholarship to come to their school. I went in with a scholarship.

By the spring, I was looking at the brochures that showed up in the mail about job opportunities and one came along that I thought was interesting: Special agent for the Internal Revenue Service; criminal investigation on taxes. I was fascinated by taxes and this involved investigation and it involved law. I applied and got the job. I worked at the Treasury Department for five years.

KLEISCH: Did you enjoy that?
CORNUE: Yes, with the exception that I had a philosophical disagreement with them that increased the longer I spent there, and that resulted in my leaving after five years.

I was intrigued with the idea, you know, they got Capone this way. They couldn't get him on the other things he was doing, but they got him on taxes. There are a lot of organized crime guys, and they are cheating on their taxes at the same time. We should be focusing on this group and nailing them. The philosophy in prosecution was they were looking for easy cases – easily proved, that had a lot of publicity.

If you got some local lawyer that didn't file his income tax returns, nail him. Send him to jail. That is what they are looking for: voluntary compliance. If other people saw others were getting caught, they would comply.

It's not the justice thing I had in mind: Let's get the bad guys. You know, these are good guys, and most people don't want to pay taxes. Most of them are just careless.

KLEISCH: What led you back to farming at that point?
CORNUE: My dad died when I was 44 and I got the farm. Well, I got a path to the farm.

KLEISCH: When you came back to farming, did you have that same energy or excitement about it like when you were younger?
CORNUE: At that point, I had been practicing CPA doing tax returns for several decades. I had enough of that. I thought, as I am getting older this would be the opportunity to switch gears and get back in this. So, I did it gradually.

I was only 25 percent owner. There was the whole process of getting my sister out, dealing with my brothers, getting the tenant off the farm, and getting me on it. This took 10 or 15 years. ...

I had a guy who had been in high school a couple years ahead of me and he was a farmer a couple of miles away who had big equipment and a lot of acres. He was willing to do some custom work. It was just perfect – reasonably priced, good quality equipment; conscientious about his operation. I am working with his son now, and we have been together 33 years now. I make all the choices about how I am fertilizing and what to plant, and he does it for me. I get the crop when it is harvested and market it. It works out very well. I get to spend cold, winter nights thinking about it. [Laughter]

KLEISCH: Are you currently working as a CPA in Genoa City?
CORNUE: I sold my practice about 20 years ago. However, I still do taxes for some clients, including friends and family. I consider it more of a social thing rather than a business. I go to their houses and have coffee. Some of them feed me lunch.

KLEISCH: What do you want your legacy to be? What do you want people to remember about you?
CORNUE: You know, I haven't thought that much about it. In general, most people forget you, unless you were directly involved with them, and that's the end of it. If you want to be remembered for something, you have to create that memorial in the process, and I have no interest in doing that.

I look at it as having raised a son with whom I am very pleased. He is an adult and thinks things through and plans. He found work he absolutely enjoys and is enthusiastic about it. As far as I am concerned, he is my success. ◆

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Here's a photo of the Coral Post Office. It's also a store as you can see from the signage. This was the old Tiny and Betty's bar where Marengo historian Ed Urban said he visited as a boy for "huge" hamburgers. Tiny confirmed that the building used to be the post office. The upstairs served as Tiny and Betty's apartment. The downstairs portion, pictured on the right, was the bar. The first floor on the left had tables for dining, or dancing, when it became Sally's Corral in the early 1980s. It eventually burned down.

service to the new port on the Chicago River brought large numbers of New Englanders and New Yorkers to the area in search of fertile, cheap land. At the same time the Galena area experienced an intensive growth in lead mining.

Both movements played a critical role in the establishment of the village of Coral in McHenry County.

In order to reach Galena in the late 1820s, a series of trails from Chicago allowed miners, mail and materials to move to the mines. When First Nation people – angered by Anglo settlers ravaging their lands – rose up under the leadership of Blackhawk in 1832, the Army under Winfield Scott was sent to the aid of settlers around the Galena area. To reach Galena, in August 1832 Scott's army travelled along a trail which, according to 1890s' local historian and archaeologist Albert Scharf, wound its way from south of Elgin to present day Genoa – and beyond to Belvidere (Milo Quaife, Chicago's Highways Old and New, 1923).

Some say that Scott's army followed the current Route 20 from Elgin through present-day Coral and Marengo to Belvidere. James Gifford, remembered as the founder of Elgin, blazed this trail.

"Gifford desired to make Elgin a great point on the thoroughfare from Chicago to Galena, and he realized that positive effort was required to divert travel thither from the lie of the army trail," Quaife wrote. "To this end, he undertook to mark out a road west of Elgin for the use of emigrants, and he persevered in his task until a route had been surveyed as far as Belvidere."

Frink and Walker stagecoaches made their appearance on the trail in late 1837, with service between Elgin and Rockford formally beginning on Jan. 1, 1838. It was Gifford's trail that early settlers used in order to move into southwest McHenry County. That route is clearly marked on the 1839 survey map (General Land Office).

There is some question as to who first the settled land that would become Coral. Some say that it was Richard Simkins who came into the area in 1833 and made a claim on land in Section 6 of what would become Coral Township, settling permanently in 1834. Section 6 is located one half mile to the west of the village.

Others bestow the honor of first settler on John Hamilton. It is said he came to the area in 1836. Also in the running is O. P. Rogers, who also arrived in 1836. Formal claims to the land on which the Coral village sits (west half of Section 8) made at the Chicago federal land office were made by Proctor Smith who made his claim in July 1839 and Mason Hicks who made his claim two months later.

By 1838, Simkins had moved on to Boone County where he married Evaline Ames in July 1838. He died in Garden Prairie and is buried in the cemetery there. Hamilton died in an accident shortly after coming to the county. He was helping Calvin Spencer to build a cabin in what would become Marengo when he was crushed by a falling log and

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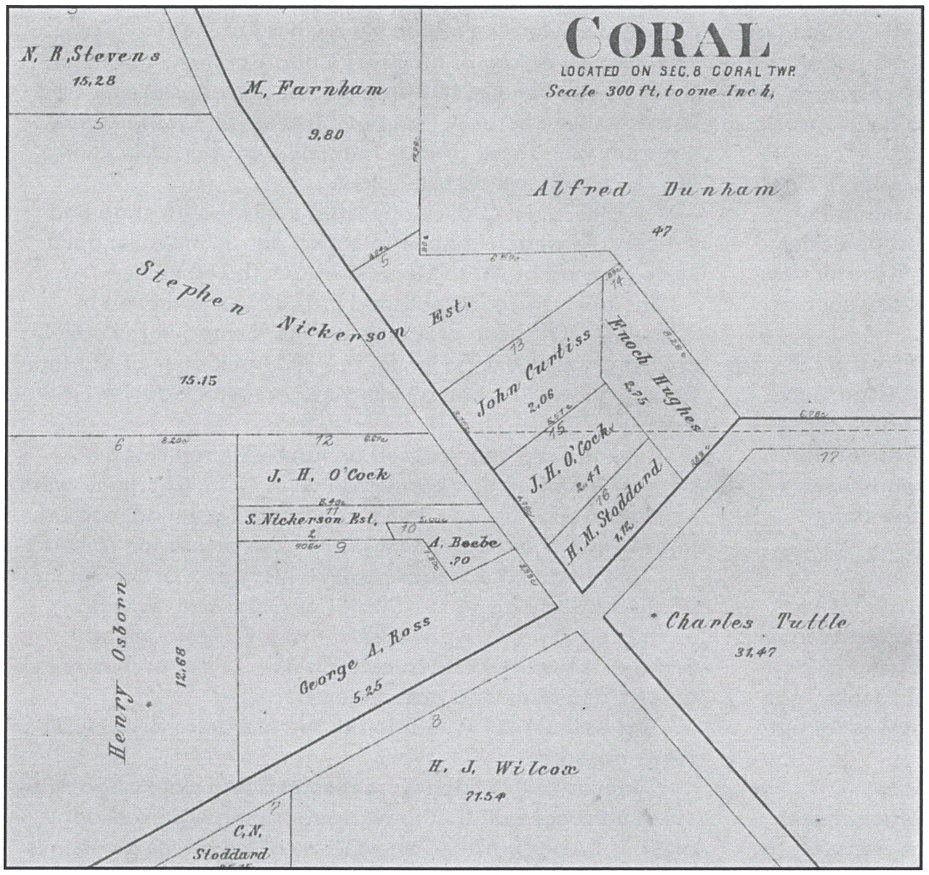

Plat map of Coral - 1892.

died after lingering for a few months.

Proctor Smith lived in the county with his nine children, presented to him by three consecutive wives. The second wife, Eliza Kane, whom he married in the county in October 1841, died four years later. His last marriage, in May 1846, was to a young woman named Alice. About 1856, he moved with Alice and the children to Iowa. By the end of the Civil War, the Smith family was living in Purcell, Mo., where he died in September 1876.

A fanciful drawing of a clapboard house seen in the *1832-1968 History of McHenry County*, captioned as the dwelling built in what would become Coral, is said to have been built in 1836 by a Peter Smith [sic – Proctor Smith] and is also said to be the first post office there.

The 1885 History of McHenry County says that the first post office was located in a store run by Edmund Fillmore and Loyal Anderson. For a time the Smith building also served as a tavern/rest stop for those on passing stagecoaches.

Fillmore, born in Vermont in 1812, was listed in the 1840 federal census of Coral. At the age of 50 he enlisted in the 95th Illinois Infantry in 1862. A possible reason for his enlistment is that his store burned to the ground – probably about 1858. He remained in Coral until his death in February 1885. He is buried in the Coral Cemetery, alongside his wife.

Fillmore's partner, Loyal Anderson, left Coral with his family about 1858 to become a dry goods merchant in Mauston, Wis. He died in March 1878 from the effects of asthma while visiting relatives in Nebraska. He is buried in Mauston.

By 1850, seven additional men set up shop in the village: John Dow was a shoemaker, John Bowen and Charles Connor were joiners (furniture making), Hiram Mabri was a "tavern keeper," John Holbrook was a blacksmith, Charles Trowbridge made harnesses and Stephen Pelton repaired wagons.

Why did these men set up their businesses where they did? In most cases, settlers wanted to find at least a fairly deep stream, which they could dam to provide power for a saw or grist mill. This was not the case with Coral. The answer seems to lie in the terrain around Section 8 in relation to the increasing amount of traffic on the Elgin – Galena trail.

Nothing is known of Dow after 1850. Bowen's wife, Nancy (nee Vrooman), died in Coral in April 1886 and is buried in the Coral Cemetery. Mabri left Coral in 1852 for California. He died in Weaverville, Calif. in September 1893 and is buried there with his wife.

Nothing is known of either Holbrook or Trowbridge. Stephen Pelton married Francelia Brigham in McHenry County in May 1854 and then left for Iowa. He returned to New York, where he was born and later died.

A community cemetery was platted as early as 1838. Among its early burials were three children of Selah and Lucinda Markham, Almond, Horace and Julia who all died within nine months of each other. Shortly after their deaths, Selah and Lucinda left for Minnesota with their five surviving children. The gravestones of a son of Loyal Anderson and that of Lyman Stewart both have the death date of August 15,1850, and both say that they were "killed on Humboldt Mountain," a future railroad town settled in the mid-1850s. What actually happened and whether their bodies actually are buried in the Coral Cemetery has been lost to time.

Curiously, no church was erected to go along with the cemetery, although Isaac Marvin, a Baptist Minister, was living near Richard Simkins in 1840. There, a mile west of Coral, he founded the Coral Baptist Church in 1842.

No doubt farmers and businessmen in 1850, believed that their situation on or near a major trail would bring great and lasting prosperity to their community. It was not to be.

Back in Chicago in the mid-1840s, talk of bringing a railroad to Chicago to serve outlying communities was all about that city. William Butler Ogden, who had made a fortune speculating in Chicago land sales in the 1830s and 1840s, made the first move. He envisioned a rail line, which would stretch from Chicago to Galena, the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, which would bring vast shipments of agricultural products into the city for shipment east on the Great Lakes instead of those things enriching St. Louis merchants. His plan was to build along the already established trails to Elgin and then beyond to Galena.

Rails were laid to Elgin in 1849 and business for the

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railroad boomed when it opened for regular traffic in January 1850. Construction toward Galena, however, stalled. Butler needed to raise additional funds for a more expensive "second division" of the railroad and surveyors had to work out a final right of way for the line into Rockford.

Instead of following the road from Elgin to Galena, along the well-established trail, which ran through Coral, the road's construction engineer found that it would be easier to establish a right of way through flatter terrain in Huntley. That avoided having to carve cuts through the hilly country between Coral and Marengo.

Thus, after funding was obtained, by late 1851 the railroad went through Huntley and Marengo, which bypassed Coral. With that, all hope for Coral's continued prosperity rapidly faded. Travelers abandoned stagecoaches in favor of the train. Grain and other shipments were sent to and from Chicago on the tracks of the Galena and Chicago Union – instead of on ponderous, expensive wagons.

Traffic on the trail through Coral became a rarity.

Still, the tiny burg clung to its existence. In 1885, Coral Township boasted 11 schools – more than any other township in the county. Coral School, established as early as 1839 on West Coral Road, was badly vandalized after students "got into a frolic" at the end of their term in 1848. It was rebuilt just west of town and remained until 1956.

The building, now a private home, still stands.

The 1860 federal census of Coral listed a wagon maker, a blacksmith, a "merchant" and a shoemaker. A decade later, clustered around a listing for William S. Ross, Coral's postmaster, were a cooper, a wagon maker, and a grocer. *The 1877 Directory of McHenry County* states, "at present, Coral post office has one small store." The business listing in that volume actually lists two businesses: Charles Clark, a wagon maker and Truman Kimball, a cooper, as well as a "Coral butter and cheese" plant.

By 1885, J. H. O'cock operated a blacksmith shop and T. Ross had wagon shop. There also was a "miscellaneous store" owned by W. L. Morse, besides the creamery.

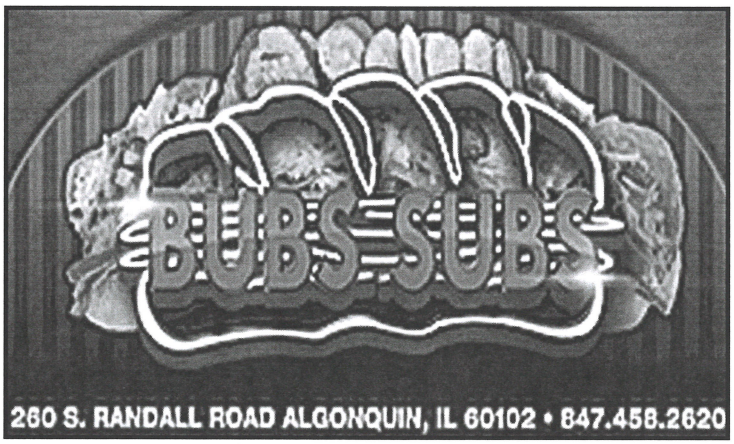
The post office, established in 1837 was removed in June 1901. Of those property owners located in the still unincorporated village limits, the 1908 plat atlas of McHenry County shows just one building owner – stock dealer George Ross.

But the Coral Inn, located on Route 20, remained a popular eatery until it burned down in 1945. Charlie Bowers converted a farmhouse into the popular hotel and restaurant. In 1917 you could buy a famous chicken dinner for 75 cents.

They then built a dance pavilion just north of the inn. Bands such as Belvidere's Black Cat Orchestra, as well as the Old Time, Goodwin & McAndrews, Melodyland, Smith, Footwarmer and Rockford's Joe Kayser orchestras entertained guests to rave reviews.

The April 24, 1934, edition of the *Marengo Republican-News* noted:

"Dances at Coral Inn were resumed two weeks ago, with splendid success in that crowds are attending, excellent music is being furnished and the excellent dance pavilion is proving a popular mecca for dancers." ◆



Winter Mystery Photo

This "new" Spring Grove District 11 school opened in 1901 on North Street.
A one-room school had existed in town since 1880, but by 1898 need for more space was clear.
A new, two-room school was built for $1,500 and the old building was sold for $96. The building was razed in the 1960s.

Spring Mystery Photo

Just one of the buildings pictured remains.
Do you know where it is located and what it was used for?

Tracer:

Quarterly Newsletter of the McHenry County Historical Society

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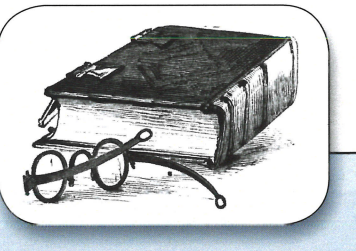

New at the Library...

- Marengo School District – Nolan School Record Book, 1910-1945.
- Marengo School District – Nolan School, Teacher's Daily Register, 1914-18, 1923.
- Marengo School District – Nolan School, Welch's system combining attendance, classification, graduation and close (record book) supervision, 1921-28.
- A.W. Simons farm account book, circa 1911-24.
- Village of Lakewood Comprehensive Plan, 1999
- U.S. Census Bureau, McHenry County, Ill. 1850 (2 volumes).
- U.S. Census Bureau, McHenry County, Ill. 1880 (2 volumes).
- Abstract of Title: Peter Murray, Woodstock, Dorr Township.
- Hebron State Bank Chattel Mortgage Docket, 1924-1934.
- Scott Forge Employee Hanbook, Spring Grove, 1993.
- Woodstock Mozart Festival programs: 1987-92; 1995-99; 2002-03; 2005-2015.

New Members

David Rhodes, Cary
Kelli & Philip A. Wegener, Crystal Lake
Drew & Lisa Georgi, Hebron
Michael Vijuk & Beth Krueger, Cary
Carlos J. & Lori Acosta, Woodstock
Suzanne Ness, Crystal Lake
McHenry Public Library, McHenry
Scott Regula, McHenry
Deana Graham, McHenry
Nancy Humphrey Haskins, Island Lake
Cathy Kittredge Plodzien, Crystal Lake
Linda Peters, Harvard
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